

Council debates nuclear waste safety

By Kevin Hanken

Questions about safety guidelines for the proposed shipment of spent radioactive materials through Lincoln stirred a debate at the City Council meeting Monday.

On Jan. 24, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission approved the Nebraska Public Power District's route for shipping spent nuclear fuel from the Cooper Nuclear Station near Brownville to General Electric's storage facility near Morris, Ill. The outlined route runs through 17 southeast Nebraska towns, including Lincoln.

Lincoln City Councilman Eric Youngberg has proposed a city ordinance that would set guidelines intended to make these shipments safer to Lincoln residents.

Youngberg told the council the ordinance is based on the premise NPPD officials should prove that such shipments via Burlington Northern Railroad are as safe as possible. A national policy for such transportation routes is needed desperately and has been resisted by the federal government, Youngberg said.

Jay Pilant, NPPD division manager for licensing and quality assurance, outlined

opposition to four major areas of the ordinance:

—The ordinance discriminates against the commercial shipment of nuclear waste, but concedes that safety measures for military and medical research shipments are adequate.

—Reasonable alternatives to shipping spent fuel cannot be reached.

—Requirements to obtain a permit, and the fee, are viewed as unacceptable.

—Further notification of shipment details, other than the seven-day advance notice to the governor of the state, must come from state officials, not NPPD.

Representatives of the Nebraska Safe Energy Committee, which showed a slide presentation to the council, said that because only a few commercial facilities have shipped such waste, NPPD's experience should not be used as a reason for trusting their capabilities.

The committee also pointed out that the 65-to-70-ton casks, which hold three tons of spent fuel, have been tested only by computer simulation and scale models. Therefore, it was argued, the tests were misleading and objectionable.

Pilant said the current NRC and U.S. Department of Transportation regulations that NPPD operates under, adequately protect residents of Lincoln and surrounding areas. In addition, NPPD has voluntarily implemented special safety measures. A "chase vehicle," a separate train with moderating equipment and effective personnel on board, will be in constant radio contact, and within minutes, of the shipment train.

Special speed limits will be set for BN trains during the 30-hour trip from Cooper Station to Morris, Pilant said. Accidents occurring at speeds up to 30 mph would not result in forces exceeding the cask's damage resistance, he said.

Eugene Voiland, GE's manager of the nuclear fuel and services division at the Morris operation, said severe testing of casks at the Sandia National Laboratories in New Mexico showed no evidence of any failure in the actual container.

Voiland said the accident scenarios suggested in the SEC slide were speculative. After 31 years in the nuclear industry, he said, he believes real risks are limited.

The Morris facility has received 500 shipments of spent fuel, 450 in casks, dur-

ing the last 11 years without any accidents releasing radioactivity, Voiland said.

The SEC said that building dry-storage facilities could handle the spent fuel until a permanent waste depository is completed. Such a depository is scheduled to begin operation before 1998 under the recently passed Waste Policy Act.

Joe Flash, NPPD information coordinator, said no such facilities have been built in the United States, and that if one was built, there would be no guarantee that the NRC would grant it a license. Construction and licensing could cost up to \$60 million, he said.

"If we ship it (the waste) now, it costs NPPD roughly \$2 million, but only in transportation costs because GE is storing it in their facility without charging," Flash said.

"If we elected to wait, we run the risk of not having GE wait for us, which means we'd have to search for another facility, which at current storage costs for the amount of material we want stored, would cost \$30 million.

Continued on Page 7



Staff photo by Craig Andresen

Storm yields chills, spills

A major snow storm hit Lincoln Tuesday. Clockwise from top: Pam Merkle shields herself against the blowing snow with a scarf. Tim Norlan, left, takes a spill near 13th and R streets while walking with John Regan.



Staff photo by John Zoz

Site, funding approved for new Culture Center; move awaits regents' OK

By Ward W. Triplett III

It took almost two hours for members of the Culture Center Task Force and other students to convince Nebraska Union Board members that the center's activities should be moved to the Terrace Hall annex, 425 University Terrace.

It took less time for the Committee for Fees Allocation to approve an additional \$13,000 in the union's 1983-84 budget to operate the Terrace Hall building.

But, according to a university regent, the decisions were made too quickly, and another option should be considered before \$180,000 in bond funding is approved to renovate Terrace Hall.

"If we acquire Whittier school," Regent Ed Schwartzkopf of Lincoln said, "there would be a number of possibilities for it. I think it could lend itself to the kind of activities the Culture Center wants to have now."

Schwartzkopf said the Whittier option could be more feasible than spending the \$180,000 needed to remodel a building that is "insufficient and mediocre."

Schwartzkopf's contention that Whittier's potential space advantages should be explored nearly echoed the argument Union Board President Laura Meyer gave at the Jan. 19 board meeting.

Meyer and several other board members had suggested bypassing the Terrace Hall option until other options, such as a new building, could be examined.

Culture Center Task Force members had answered no, saying a new building was too much of a long shot and their studies had determined that Terrace Hall, currently occupied by Tau Kappa Epsilon, was the best option available. The building already is owned by the university, and is closer to the middle of campus — an important factor for the center. In the end, the board voted 6-4 to approve the Terrace Hall option.

Schwartzkopf voiced his objections, after CFA voted on the union budget.

Schwartzkopf said Whittier has not been considered carefully enough as a potential site for the center. The building's location at 22nd and Vine streets, would not have to be a factor if the programs offered were strong enough, he said.

"In Whittier, there is plenty of office

space, a cafeteria, an auditorium, a stage and plenty of open space to hold any type of function they could have," Schwartzkopf said.

Vice Chancellor of Student Affairs Richard Armstrong said the Terrace Hall building cannot accommodate more than 50 persons in one room. It will also not be accessible to handicapped students without major renovations.

"But I tend to agree with the students who say it (Whittier) is far from the center of campus. Since that was a prominent consideration for moving the center, for that reason it would appear to be not as attractive as the other options," Armstrong added.

Center Director Ennio Quevedo agreed.

The present Culture Center at 1016 N. 16th St. has stood for 10 years, serving as a meeting place for the African People's Union, the Mexican-American Student Association and the Native American Student Association.

Last year, a study by the University's Physical Plant determined the building was in unsatisfactory condition and was too poorly constructed to justify projected renovation costs.

Late last semester, Armstrong appointed the task force to find another location for the center. Terrace Hall was identified, and a feasibility study completed in November.

Most of the student groups who use the center believed Terrace Hall was preferable to the present building, which will be demolished for parking-lot space.

Whittier, which was never considered by the task force, is not feasible because it is further from campus than the present structure, Perez said.

"If (Schwartzkopf) has ever walked from the union to the Culture Center, he should know that's a long hike," she said.

Wardell Smith, a graduate assistant at the Culture Center for two years, said the move would defeat the purpose and objective of the students on campus who chose the Terrace Hall building.

"It's always convenient for people in power to pick our location for us. It should be understood that the students and what they want should be considered more," Smith said.

Continued on Page 3